

# Noise as a Measure of Success

The members of the Un-American Activities Committee listened politely the other day while Eric L. Johnston, president of the Motion Picture Association, deplored the committee's investigation because it spread damaging impressions of Hollywood.

Humphrey Bogart and his party of actors and actresses went to Washington and got their names and pictures in the papers by denouncing the committee as un-American itself. They petitioned the Speaker of the House to "end its abuses."

A picture director named Edward Dymtryk chided the committee with: "I cannot join in this wholesale liquidation of the principle of free expression."

And prompted by the Progressive Citizens of America, a group of notable Southern California scientists (scientists lately have suffered from a weakness for signing their names to manifestoes) has petitioned the President and the Speaker of the House to abolish the committee. The scientists say they fear the committee's action may result in attempts to "intimidate and stifle all cultural and social thought except that approved by the . . . committee . . ."

These extracts from the news reports of the last several days fairly represent the main objections to the present investigation in Washington which seeks to discover who the Communists and their fellow travelers in the motion-picture industry are, and what they do. The objections vary, but all the objectors seem to agree that there should be no investigation of Communists and their fellow travelers in Hollywood. It boils down to that.

Some of these objectors profess to hate Communism and all its works. Mr. Johnston has called them "traitors, subversives and dupes of the Kremlin." However, the Progressive Citizens of America, in whose name the scientists speak, is the Henry Wallace "liberal" outfit which does not exclude Communists from its communion.

Most of the objectors say they hate and fear Communism, but they do not think the Communists of Hollywood should be exposed—at least, they do not want them exposed by the Committee on Un-American Activities of the U.S. House of Representatives.

This committee, which is abhorred more than the Communists it is trying to find, has done a pretty good job up to the present. Its leadership and its membership are not brilliant, but they have clung to their purpose despite all the attempts at diversion by the committee's enemies and some of its intemperate

friends. It is exercising the legitimate and traditional functions of finding out things for the guidance of the Congress.

Witnesses and their friends and counselors have been conspiring since the Hollywood hearing began to confuse the public as to this function and to raise antagonism to the committee by misrepresenting it. They pretend that the committee hearings are a trial. On this pretext they cry out because the rules of evidence which limit court procedure are not observed. This is the basis of most of the complaints about violation of constitutional rights and persecution.

The committee does not sit as a court. It does not find anyone guilty and it does not absolve anyone; it seeks facts. It cannot bring charges directly, although it can with concurrence of the Speaker or the House membership instruct law officers of the United States to prosecute witnesses in Federal court for contempt of Congress or for perjury. It bears some resemblance to a grand jury which seeks the truth without following the rules of evidence. It usually does not permit cross-examination, which is a court device to protect innocence.

The new committee, constituted with the new Congress, inherited the discredit which Martin Dies and the Wood-Rankin leadership gave it in earlier days. Under Dies the committee dug up a vast library of evidence against subversives, but it also was guilty of character assassination and publicity seeking. The good it did outweighed the evil, but the evil lives longer.

The present committee has avoided past errors. It has worked with the F.B.I. for one thing. It is making full use of the report of the Royal Commission on Russian Espionage in Canada. It exposed Gerard and Hanns Eisler. Certainly these activities concern the public welfare.

The result of its recent activity is almost certain. Congress will enact some sort of legislation dealing with Communists. Without this committee's discoveries we might continue for some time in the naive pretense that Communists are a political party, like Democrats and Republicans, instead of the agents of a foreign government bent on revolution through violence.

The noise from the Hollywood set is a good gauge of the committee's success. The louder the protests, the better the committee is doing. Henry Morgan read a mythical letter to the editor on his radio program the other evening. The writer complained that the investigation in Washington had degenerated into a witch hunt. It was signed "A Witch."